

Missions of the church of the nazarene

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Evangelical Protestantism really began with John Wesley, arguably one of the most charismatic, thoughtful and persuasive of the new brand of preacher appearing in America in the 18th century. The Methodist movement was built around an idea directly opposed to the Calvinist concept of predestination. What Methodism centered on was the idea that anyone could be 'saved'. But, as that concept was Arminian, that salvation is possible only through Grace, and that grace could not be earned through acts of humanity.

John Wesley introduced and championed the idea that it was possible to elevate the human heart and mind, through communion, prayer and spiritual meditation, to a state of 'Christian Perfection'. At the turn of the 20th century, in addition to all of the other fundamental changes in society including the industrial revolution, the rise of American power in the world, and the end of slavery and the pacification of the South, religion and religious belief had again become a central part of American life.

Into this flux, and in an effort to resolve the growing crisis of conflicting faiths and an increasing splintering of Methodism, a unifying theology appeared. Combining all of the Methodist Pentecostal denominations and the Holiness Church of Christ and five other denominations, the Church of the Nazarene emerged under the combined umbrella of Harding and the Holiness Movement – neither of which had been combined previously on such large scale. The new Church of the Nazarene, which combined churches in Europe, North and South America began expanding while simultaneously absorbing other holiness churches and upon very active missionary that continues today. It is the purpose of this paper to present the state of the

Church of the Nazarene and how its missionary history helped it to continue to grow and expand into the twenty-first century.

The Nazarene Church missions have, historically, placed themselves directly in the center of crises. It is no coincidence that all of the denominations that came together to form the Church of the Nazarene were missionary churches. At the beginning, “the Nazarenes had 52 churches with 3, 827 members, while the Pentecostals numbered 47 churches with 2, 371 members. The union made a combined list of 99 churches and 6, 198 members,”[1]. Harding’s message was that while God had chosen to give every human being a certain quality of pure grace that could not be removed or augmented by human action, it was within our grasp to become closer to God through the rituals of faith.

The Church of the Nazarene took up the Great Commission, that “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12: 3) and, in the final chapter of Matthew, “Go and make disciples of all the nations of the world, baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded to you,” (Matthew 28: 18-20). It then began to spread itself vigorously to every corner of the world seeking to fulfill that very mission[2]. Indeed, it would later become the requirement that all senior members of the church and, in particular, all ministers, complete missionary work.

Nazarene Church missions have taken several different forms over the course of the past century. The first, clearly, was the outreach missionary work that followed the traditional lines of church work. The second, was the establishment of Nazarene Church colleges throughout the world. The third,

was the combined efforts of all Nazarene churches and associations throughout the world under one charter and mission, to keep the Great Commission.

The first Nazarene Church missions began taking place shortly after the creation of the institution. As the main centers of the church, at the time of inception, were on the East and West coasts of the United States. From the Eastern churches emerged Susan Fitkin and her partner Harrison F. Reynolds. Fitkin and Reynolds based their missions upon a divine revelation of Fitkin's – that she had been selected by God to spread His word throughout the world and that missionary work was the most powerful and significant of the works that any human could perform for God.

Fitkin then stirred up the passions of the church for missions and, in particular, missions to traditionally non-Christian nations. Fitkin's work directly influenced the direction of Nazarene missions then and today. It was because of Fitkin that the Nazarene Church made missionary work the centerpiece of the expression of their faith.

Following upon Fitkin's example, Dorothy Fay Davis took up the leadership reins at the Raleigh Fitkin Memorial Hospital and Nazarene Nursing School in Bremersdorp, Swaziland in the 1950's[3]. Her missionary work, like Fitkin's, began with a "calling" from God. Davis built churches, preached her sermon, and brought the Nazarene form of faith to Swaziland and to the whole of South Africa and, following also in the footsteps of Florence Nightingale, she began a movement of teaching Swazi women how to be Christian nurses[4].

Davis lived and worked in Swaziland as a spiritual leader, the college headmaster, and as a minister in her many churches until the mid 1980's- a career that spanned four decades and her works continue to be influential in terms of the Nazarene missions.

Missionaries were not the only Nazarene members making missions. One of the most influential Nazarene members was C. Warren Jones. Jones had become one of the executives managing foreign missions in the mid 1940's. Under his leadership, the Nazarene Church raised more than one-million dollars to support their missions. His influence was felt throughout the world as the money raised became the foundation of countless churches, the travel and living expenses of missionaries, and the foundation of the Nazarene schools and colleges[5].

These people, and countless others, worked together over the past one-hundred years of the Nazarene church have built a legacy of missionary work. What began with a small number of missions has become a sweeping program of ministry, education, health-care, social services, and all forms of community involvement both domestically and abroad. As a true world-wide organization, the Nazarene Church succeeds in bringing together Christians from nearly every nation into a singular network that has no national anchor.

The missionary work now centers on exactly the same mission as when the church started, “ To make (form and bring into being through transforming grace) Christlike (holy, righteous) disciples (continual, reproductive followers of Christ) in the nations (a sent, international church). A Church whose primary motive is to glorify God,[6]”. To that end, the Nazarene Church also maintains radio and television programs, supports Christian film productions,

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operates publishing houses throughout the world, manages youth-ministries, and health clinics[7].

The Nazarene Church began with a very clear intent – to spread the Word of God throughout the world in following the Great Commission. In this, the Nazarenes have been exceptionally successful. Their work and their missionaries have demonstrated a true zeal for their pursuit and have demonstrated an unwavering conviction.

Their Wesleyan / Holiness foundation made the Nazarene church uniquely ideologically and scripturally suited to the kind of missionary work they do now. By placing themselves in the places of greatest need in the world, they have also succeeded in walking the walk of the true spiritual guide to those in need. Each member has been tasked with one primary goal – not to raise money, not to falsely inflate their sense of purpose, but to guide others to embrace God and Christ.

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